

Heritage, History & Memory Project
(Workshop 4)

**The Road to Sunningdale and the
Ulster Workers' Council Strike of May 1974**

A presentation by

Dr. Aaron Edwards

followed by a panel and general discussion

compiled by

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Introduction

The Fellowship of Messines Association was formed in May 2002 by a diverse group of individuals from Loyalist, Republican and other backgrounds, united in their realisation of the need to confront sectarianism in our society as a necessary means of realistic peace-building. The project also engages young people and new citizens on themes of citizenship and cultural and political identity.

In 2018 the Association initiated its **Heritage, History & Memory Project**. For the inaugural launch of this project it was decided to focus on the period of the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement, and the early stages of the ‘Troubles’. To accomplish this, it was decided to host a series of six workshops, looking at different aspects of that period. The format for each workshop would comprise a presentation by a respected commentator/historian, which would then be followed by a general discussion involving people from diverse political backgrounds, who would be encouraged to share not only their thoughts on the presentation, but their own experiences and memories of the period under discussion.

This pamphlet details the *fourth* of those workshops. The key-note speaker was **Dr. Aaron Edwards** who has been a Senior Lecturer in Defence and International Affairs at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, since 2008. A Fellow of the Royal Historical Society, Aaron was awarded his PhD by Queen’s University, Belfast, in 2006. He is the author of several books: *A History of the Northern Ireland Labour Party: Democratic Socialism and Sectarianism*; *Mad Mitch’s Tribal Law: Aden and the End of Empire*; *War, a Beginners Guide*; and his most recent publication *UVF: Behind the Mask*.

The key-note presentation was augmented by a panel comprising the following:

Dr. Sean Farren, born and educated in Dublin, qualified as a teacher and has taught in Sierra Leone, Switzerland and Ireland. Appointed Lecturer of the School of Education at the New University of Ulster in 1970, he joined the SDLP [Social Democratic and Labour Party] and was elected to its Executive in 1974. He stood as an SDLP candidate and won a seat in the Assembly several times. He became one of the SDLP’s negotiating team and participated in several inter-party talks. After the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement he became a minister in the power-sharing Executive, 1999-2002. He is also the author of several books.

Dr. Sean Brennan is a Visiting Research Fellow at Queen’s University, Belfast, School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics. His PhD focused on the challenges of reintegrating Loyalist ex-combatants in a post-ceasefire space. He has worked in the community sector since the 1990s in a variety of roles.

Jim Wilson was born in East Belfast. In 1974 he was one of the few remaining Loyalist internees, and can give a perspective from those in the Loyalist working-class community who ended up in prison as a result of the conflict. He has been engaged in grassroots community work for many years.

Sean O’Hare was born in West Belfast. He has been a life-long republican with family connections to republicanism which stretch back several generations. A major influence on Sean’s political views were the years he spent in London in the 1960s, where he came into contact with radical Labour politics. The direct connection Sean has with 1974 is that he stood as a non-sectarian candidate for the Republican Clubs in the Assembly elections of 1973.

The *Chair* for the workshop was **Peter Bunting**, Assistant General Secretary, Irish Congress of Trade Unions, with responsibility for co-ordinating and developing the Trade Union Movement in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Committee of ICTU is the representative body for 34 trade unions with approximately 215,000 members across Northern Ireland.

The *Facilitator* for the workshop was **Martin Snodden**, a Loyalist ex-prisoner, who has worked closely with the Messines Project, and who while in prison engaged in exchanges with Republicans about “who we were, where we were, and, more importantly, where we would be going”. He is now an international trauma and conflict resolution worker.

The event was held at *The Somme Heritage Centre*, Conlig, Co. Down.

Immediately after the key-note and panel presentations a wide-ranging discussion ensued, the participants in this discussion themselves reflecting a wide variety of backgrounds. The verbatim transcription of the entire workshop ran to 47 pages; hence, while Dr. Edwards’ key-note presentation is recorded here in full, of necessity all the other contributions had to be edited to fit into the available space (and also to make this document more readable and accessible).

Harry Donaghy *Co-ordinator*, The Fellowship of Messines Association

The Road to Sunningdale & the Ulster Workers' Council Strike of May 1974

Dr. Aaron Edwards

“The strike was never a strike in the sense that we in the Labour Movement would understand. It was in reality a coup organised for political purposes and carried into operation by armed men behaving as a paramilitary force and acting in accordance with a pre-ordained plan”

Paddy Devlin, *The Fall of the Northern Ireland Executive* (1975), p. 88.

Introduction

I would like to thank the Messines Project for the opportunity to speak to you on the topic of the road to Sunningdale and the Ulster Workers' Council (UWC) strike of May 1974. Over the course of my talk I want to address the following question: Why did the Protestant working class mobilise in support of the strike, which had as its central objective the desire to destroy the Sunningdale Agreement and force fresh elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly? To answer this question, therefore, the talk is organised into three sections. The first part explores the nature of the violence on the streets and British government attempts to end it, from the fall of Stormont in March 1972 to the Tripartite talks convened in Sunningdale in Berkshire in December 1973. Sunningdale mapped out the government's policy in relation to power sharing between unionists and nationalists and so it is important to examine the logic which underpinned these negotiations. The second part of my talk focuses on the UWC strike and the consequences the success of the stoppage had for its organisers and their supporters. The final section of the paper addresses the legacy of Sunningdale and the UWC strike in light of recent attempts to reanimate power sharing. I argue that lessons from the past can help us understand the current political impasse in Northern Ireland.

Violence and the Road to Sunningdale

The outbreak of intercommunal conflict between Protestant Unionists and Catholic Nationalists in the summer of 1969 had been building up for several years. Despite the failure of the IRA's border campaign in 1956-62, the organisation was believed to be planning a return to violence to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising.

Although no threat emerged, certain unionist politicians had adjudicated in the formation of the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) in late 1965. The UVF carried out a series of armed attacks before its leading lights were imprisoned for their role in a sectarian murder in June 1966. Three years later the UVF re-emerged to carry out the bombings of key installations across the Province in an attempt to de-stabilise the liberal unionist government of Captain Terence O'Neill. At the time, O'Neill faced challenges on two fronts: First, from the UVF and its sister organisation, the Ulster Protestant Volunteers, and, second, from the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, which had initiated protest marches against discrimination in jobs, housing and employment. Confrontation with the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) soon followed, leading inevitably to sectarian clashes between Protestants and Catholics. Overwhelmed by the sheer scale of civil disturbances, the RUC requested the assistance of the British Army, which deployed onto the streets on 14 and 15 August 1969. Over the next two-and-a-half years the Army launched a series of high-profile operations, including the Falls Road curfew of June 1970, internment without trial in August 1971, and the fateful confrontation with civil rights marchers in Derry in January 1972, known subsequently as 'Bloody Sunday'.

Up until this point, much of the violence emanated from the two principal armed fringes of the nationalist and unionist communities. On the one hand, there was the IRA, which had split into two opposing wings – the Officials and Provisionals – in December 1969. IRA violence began with the basic objective of defending Catholics from Protestant attacks, though it later progressed to the broader strategic objective of seeking a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland. Tactically, it took the form of open gun battles with the police and army as well as involvement in rioting. By 1972, the Provisionals were emerging as a force to be reckoned with, though they divided their attacks between hitting security forces targets 'on the float' while carrying out scores of assassinations of Protestant civilians in North and West Belfast. For Henry Patterson, the Provos represented a Faustian bargain between the republican purism of Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and a 'rampant Northern Republicanism deeply inlaid with sectarianism'. Despite the Provisionals' meteoric rise, the unionist Prime Minister Brian Faulkner was claiming that by the end of 1971, Belfast was almost free of IRA activity and that the organisation's morale was low owing to the effects of internment. Indeed, the Army had been boasting of the IRA's demise since October 1971, despite the organisation contributing exponentially to some 30 bomb attacks and a startling rise in the death toll a few weeks later. On the other side of the sectarian divide was the UVF, which was responsible for a litany of bombings and shootings, including the

McGurk's Bar atrocity of 4 December 1971. Importantly, the UVF was joined in the paramilitary arena by the Ulster Defence Association (UDA), a mass organisation formed in September 1971 from a number of local vigilante groupings. The UDA's motto was Cicero's *cedant arma togae* – 'let war yield peace' – chosen to reflect the organisation's desire, ironically, to see the reintroduction of the law in Northern Ireland. As historian Thomas Hennessey reminds us, the UDA's aims were to establish an organisation that would be able to take over 'in the event of a complete breakdown of law and order' and to operate as a pressure group to ensure that its policies were 'kept to the forefront of political activity'. As Hennessey also notes, the growth of loyalist paramilitarism 'was related to the increasing levels of violence and the perception that the security forces could not contain violent republicanism'. The number of casualties incurred by the security situation by the end of 1971 was 174 dead and 2,592 injured, an increase from 25 dead and 811 injured in 1970.

The coercive thrust of the Army's counter-insurgency strategy, however, would soon prove a liability. On 30 January 1972 British paratroopers opened fire on a civil rights protest march in Derry/Londonderry killing 13 people. Simon Winchester, the correspondent for *The Guardian* in Belfast, captured the mood best when he reported how:

The tragic and inevitable Doomsday situation which has been universally forecast for Northern Ireland finally arrived in Londonderry yesterday afternoon when soldiers, firing into a large crowd of civil rights demonstrators, shot and killed 13 civilians... After the shooting, which lasted for about 25 minutes in and around the Rossville Flats area of Bogside, the streets had all the appearance of the aftermath of Sharpeville.

In the wake of the killings, Ted Heath's government in London came under enormous international pressure. Brian Faulkner recalled a telephone conversation with the Prime Minister in which, he claimed, Heath did not seem to regard the crisis as any different from others they had faced. Nevertheless, the devastation caused in the Bogside prompted London to seek the return of all security and policing powers from Belfast. In the coming weeks, Heath's Government soon came to the realisation that the only way to end the violence was through dialogue. As he told the House of Commons on 24 March 1972, in a speech signalling the prorogation of the Stormont Government:

The United Kingdom Government remain of the view that the transfer of this responsibility to Westminster is an indispensable condition for progress in

finding a political solution in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Government's decision therefore leaves them with no alternative to assuming full and direct responsibility for the administration of Northern Ireland until a political solution to the problems of the Province can be worked out in consultation with all those concerned.

While the operational responsibility for ending the violence rested with the Army on the ground, the political responsibility for the region was now firmly in the hands of London.

The fall of Stormont was greeted with fury by Unionists. For the first time in 50 years, Unionists were no longer in charge. Fearing for their political future, loyalist paramilitaries soon mobilised. Bill Craig, a former Stormont Minister and now leader of Ulster Vanguard, threatened to form a provisional government. He was joined by the Reverend Ian Paisley, the MP for North Antrim and the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, who had questioned Heath in Parliament about his government's intentions in proroguing Stormont. Paisley asked the Prime Minister for assurances on the future of the Stormont Parliament and, crucially, whether the Dublin government would be consulted on the future of Northern Ireland. While assuaging Paisley's concerns about the security situation, Heath side-stepped the issue of the Irish dimension. This would have serious repercussions in the coming months as loyalists attended mass rallies presided over by Paisley and Craig. At the end of May 1972, thousands of masked men organised into companies, three abreast and displaying well-disciplined order, were parading along the Shankill to a huge rally in Woodvale Park. Explosions could be heard in the distance as those lining the streets cheered on the men. The reality was that in the absence of local democracy, an escalation of IRA attacks and intercommunal strife, loyalist paramilitary groups flourished.

Ted Heath believed that Direct Rule would only be a temporary measure until a political solution was worked out. Talks were convened in Darlington on 25-27 September aimed at delivering on that policy. However, they were limited. Only Unionists, the Alliance Party and the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) participated, with the SDLP boycotting talks due to internment. After Darlington, *The Guardian* newspaper spearheaded calls for a power sharing settlement between unionists and nationalists:

[The] army alone cannot win peace. The attitude of the Catholic community remains crucial. For that reason alone internment must be ended as soon as possible. But it is even more important to demonstrate positively to the Catholics that they are to have a guaranteed and effective role in the new

politics of the North. In a community as divided as this, coalition administration is needed.

The Guardian bemoaned the fact that unionists had demonstrated obduracy on the matter, though as historian Gordon Gillespie later noted, we must take into account the psychological and political shock that the fall of Stormont represented for unionists. They did not believe they needed to compromise majority rule for minority aspirations. In many respects, *The Guardian* suggestion that unionists trade power for security was a moot point, especially in light of the mass mobilisation of loyalist paramilitaries now underway.

An example of how powerful the UDA had become can be seen in the secret meeting held between Tommy Herron, its leader in East Belfast, and the British Army's General Officer Commanding Northern Ireland (GOC NI), Sir Harry Tuzo, the senior British Intelligence Officer Frank Steele, and the former Secretary of the Northern Ireland Cabinet Sir Harold Black. The meeting at Stormont was convened to address complaints about the deterioration in relations between the Army and loyalists. Tuzo refuted the allegations that the Army had been deliberately provocative towards the local Protestant population. 'It must be understood,' he told the loyalists, 'that the Army could hardly be to blame for the recent incidents since it simply was not in their interest to be engaged in East Belfast when they could be better employed dealing with the IRA'. In his opinion, he 'would be prepared to withdraw from East Belfast entirely were it not for the need to protect isolated Catholic communities which saw themselves as being under continual threat of violence from their Protestant neighbours'. Herron challenged Tuzo to prove that the Army was truly 'impartial', making the case that one of the Royal Green Jackets battalions based in the city had 'behaved in a fashion more appropriate to the area from which they had come and, behaving like conquering heroes, had over-reacted to the relatively slight disorders they had encountered from the Tartan gangs'. As Herron made clear in the meeting, it would be 'unprofitable of these two forces to confront one another as enemies'. Rather, Herron believed, the 'UDA and the Army should be seen to be getting together again and talking'. It was clear in the meeting that all concerned wished to maintain positive relations, especially since they shared the same belief that the main enemy was the Provisional IRA.

The meeting confirmed what the Army had already said earlier in the summer when it narrowly avoided conflict with the UDA in West Belfast. 'The security forces remain responsible for law and order in this area, but it has been agreed that unarmed U.D.A. men may come and go provided they do not interfere with the local population or with the security forces.' For many Catholics, it quickly became apparent that the British

Government were tolerating loyalist paramilitaries and, in some areas, even actively colluding with them. Despite loyalists killing 117 people in 1972 (republicans were responsible for 264 deaths with British security forces killing 45 people), the UDA remained legal. Many of the group's violent actions were carried out under the banner of the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) so as to put distance between the UDA's commitment to law and order and local pressures exerted upon its leadership to defend Protestant communities. During 1972, there were a total of 10,631 shooting incidents along with 1,382 bombings and 471 devices neutralised by army bomb disposal officers. The academic Sarah Nelson observed how the 'disruption of normal law and order, plus souring of relations with army and police as conflict grew between loyalists and the state, gave violent men a simple, practical advantage: leeway for their actions'.

1973 signalled a move towards realising the British Government's ambitions to create a local solution to the Northern Ireland problem. The publication of *Northern Ireland Constitutional Proposals* on 20 March, in which an Assembly was proposed, was followed by elections on 28 June and the formation of a power sharing Executive on 21 November. The conference at Sunningdale was aimed at agreeing the practical mechanics of the deal between Faulknerite Unionists and the SDLP led by Gerry Fitt. The Agreement also proposed a Council of Ireland, which gave Dublin a consultative role, something loyalists had been concerned about since the fall of Stormont. In addition to the Irish dimension, there were nine clauses relating to security matters. These were designed with the explicit intention of bolstering British attempts to contain the violence. Apart from entertaining notions of an 'all-Ireland court', which would enjoy jurisdiction over both parts of the island, the Agreement also envisaged scaling back the military's role while returning the Province to 'normal policing'. In an attempt to stop the violence, the British government sought a more robust legislative framework, placing power sharing and an Irish dimension at its core. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Francis Pym, outlined this new policy in Parliament on 13 December. 'Throughout these difficult years,' he told MPs, 'it has always been said that a solution lay in a two-pronged approach: a vigorous onslaught against the terrorists, coupled with political advance. That political advance will shortly be a reality.'

“The Will of the Majority”

The newly constituted Northern Ireland Executive met for the first time on 1 January 1974. 'Many people in the community saw the Executive as a useful experiment,' remarked Health Minister Paddy Devlin, which, in his view, presented 'a real alternative to violence'... Nevertheless, a large number of loyalists were quite

indifferent to the phenomenon of having people who were regarded as Catholics on an Executive and in charge of Government Departments'. In light of loyalist hostility, Faulkner's position would be continually weakened over the next four months until the Ulster Unionist Council voted narrowly against supporting Sunningdale. Faulkner remained Chief Executive though at the head of a deeply divided party. On 14 May, the Executive commended the Agreement to the Assembly, which defeated an anti-power sharing motion by 44 votes to 28. Loyalist Assembly members present reportedly jeered Faulkner with shouts of "No to a united Ireland – never" and "No Surrender" as Faulkner beat a hasty retreat from the chamber. In the wake of the vote, Harry Murray, the chairman of the previously unknown Ulster Workers' Council, issued a statement calling for a general strike to begin with immediate effect.

The strike was slow to start. Early the next morning, Army Headquarters in Lisburn reported a generally quiet night. In the preceding twenty-four hours, there were only four shooting incidents, with shots fired at soldiers in the Beechmount and Falls areas. Two civilians were slightly hurt when an Ammunition Technical Officer (ATO) carried out a controlled explosion on the Albert Bridge, while another ATO neutralised a booby-trapped car on King's Bridge. In other incidents, a bomb exploded beside a passing Army patrol on the Glen Road area of Derry, with several shots reportedly fired in Ardnamoyle Park and sporadic stoning incidents in the Creggan estate. Outside of the cities, a culvert bomb exploded near Clontogora, while a rifle was discovered in Armagh and a mortar bomb in Cushendall. Overall, though, there were few signs of trouble in loyalist districts. By now the UWC were repeating their calls for a strike. In response, the trade union movement acted quickly to keep 'destructive politics off the shop floor'. However, the powerful emotional rhetoric by loyalist politicians contributed to a fraught situation. Andy Barr, the district secretary of the Sheetmetal Workers and Coppersmiths Union, pleaded with his 2,500 workers to report for work. Most did until lunchtime, when workers at the Harland and Wolff shipyard were threatened that their cars would be burnt if they did not walk out immediately. Later that day loyalists sealed off the port town of Larne. The tardy response to the strike had left the UWC with a strategic choice – either they could mobilise all those at their disposal, including paramilitaries, or risk the stoppage becoming a failure before it even got off the ground.

Anyone who picked up *The Times* newspaper on 16 May 1974 would have been greeted by a mix of international and national headlines. From Israeli troops in action in Lebanon to the uncertain future of Rhodesia. Clydeside workers defied their trade union to continue to build ships for the fascist junta in Chile. On the right-hand side of

the front page, however, was a dispatch from the newspaper's correspondent in Belfast, Robert Fisk, noting how a strike called by a shadowy organisation known as the UWC, which was threatening to bring Ulster to a standstill. Fisk informed his readers how, it 'seemed last night as if the loyalists were intent on creating once again the old illogicality of threatening the British authorities in order to ensure that they remained British'. Commenting on the UWC's actions, the Minister for Manpower, Robert Cooper, told reporters: 'I think it will rebound on Loyalist leaders who give it support. They will lose support as a result of this.' Later that evening, the UWC risked further alienating their base by ordering strikers to come "off the drink". This followed an intervention by the wives of strikers who said their husbands were losing money by coming out of work and spending the time down the pub. Consequently, pubs in areas like the Shankill and Newtownards Road were closed. Interestingly, pubs in Catholic areas reported a brisk trade.

The British Labour Party had come out against the stoppage and used all of its power and influence on the Northern Ireland Labour movement to persuade workers not to back it. Indeed, a local branch of the NILP in Newtownabbey had even called on the police to arrest strike leader Bill Craig. They condemned the intimidation of workers, asking people to come forward with information. However, when television cameras interviewed a female employee of Carreras, she told reporters that when she did just that, the RUC said she should 'accept a certain amount of intimidation'. The local NILP branch said that if the strike continued into the following week, the RUC and Army should be present in force outside the gates of all industrial sites. The Wilson government resisted the temptation to use force to break the strike, believing that it risked provoking a bloodbath.

Nonetheless, blood flowed. On the evening of 17 May, reports began to filter into newsrooms across Ireland of a series of explosions in Dublin and Monaghan. No warnings were issued prior to the bombings. Both wings of the IRA, as well as the UDA, were first out of the stocks to condemn the explosions. The UVF remained silent. Interestingly, republican spokesmen said that it bore all the hallmarks of an 'SAS style operation'. There can be no doubt that those involved in the bombings had been ex-servicemen now in the ranks of the UVF. Republicans like Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and Malachy Toal were quick to link the explosions to the ongoing strike in the North. Apart from speculation over what loyalist grouping was responsible for the carnage in the South, the UWC was still attempting to shut down the power plants, which would be achieved by midnight. Only one section of the Ballylumford power plant remained operational while the Derry Coolkeeragh station had closed down altogether. A bomb

blast at the cross-border interconnector on 8 February had still not been repaired, leaving the ball in the UWC's court. However, Merlyn Rees still remained adamant that he would not negotiate with the strikers. As he told a press conference: 'The Provisional IRA has tried to bomb its way to the conference table. Now people are trying to strike their way to the conference table. Either way, it's not on.' Glenn Barr called Rees' stance 'utterly irresponsible,' suggesting that it was 'absolute nonsense to suggest that the UWC was trying to blackmail the Government'.

By 20 May electricity output had dropped to one-third across Northern Ireland. The British responded by authorising the deployment of an additional 500 troops. However, it had now been recognised by the press, if not by the NIO, how the UWC represented a clear political challenge to London's plans to foist Sunningdale on the unionist community:

The strike called by the Ulster Workers' Council is explicitly political in its purpose. The strikers' demand is that new elections be held for the Northern Ireland Assembly in the immediate future. The politicians backing the demand argue that without fresh elections the will of the people is being frustrated, and their constitutional means of securing them have been exhausted without avail.

However, it was Harold Wilson's speech on 25 May that gave the UWC the greatest upsurge in support. By referring to the strikers as 'spongers', Wilson exposed both his ignorance and arrogance of the situation in equal measure. Despite further deployments of troops, the Labour government could not enforce its will on the UWC and on 28 May Brian Faulkner resigned, triggering the collapse of the power sharing Executive.

On the morning of 31 May 1974, Merlyn Rees sat at the head of a press conference at Stormont. Although he denied that the stoppage had the overwhelming support of the Protestant community, he did acknowledge the new spirit of Ulster nationalism now blowing through the Province. However, when Rees came to address Parliament in a special emergency sitting on 3 June, he was in combatant mood. 'On 14th May the Ulster Workers' Council called a strike in the Province,' he told MPs. 'This group is a non-elected body of men that sought to subvert the expressed wish and authority to this Parliament through unconstitutional and undemocratic means involving widespread intimidation.' One Conservative MP likened events to the Miners' strikes, which Rees refuted on the basis that they never 'used guns'. Concentrating his gaze on the attacks on three pubs and a fish-and-chip shop, not to mention the murders of two Catholic brothers at the Wayside Halt, he said the Ballymena incident 'demonstrated

the violent forces which emerge, and are a consequence of, a strike of this nature’.

In a review of Bob Fisk’s book on the strike, Conor Cruise O’Brien made the case that the collapse of the power sharing Executive showed ‘some of the limits of British power and, more precisely, cleverness’. In a letter to *The Times* on 6 February 1976, Professor Con O’Leary also reminded readers how the strike was not called as a protest action against power sharing but because of what he termed ‘the disastrous Sunningdale agreement between Mr Heath and Mr Cosgrove in December 1973, which inter alia would have given the Government of the Republic an indirect role in the delicate area of policing in Northern Ireland and because the electorate of Northern Ireland were not afforded the opportunity to approve the new constitutional arrangements’. This is important, for it casts the strike in a different light. It underscores the democratic will of the people being flexed in a completely alternative manner. In terms of a mandate for strike action, the Westminster election of February 1974, O’Leary maintains, was ‘skilfully converted by the Loyalist Coalition into a “plebiscite on Sunningdale” and their share of the vote increased from 36.5 per cent (in 1973) to 51.0 per cent. It was that election, rather than the strike three months later, that spelt the downfall of the Executive’.

Academics are generally sceptical about the merits of the Sunningdale Agreement. Historian Gordon Gillespie is sanguine about the benefits to the unionist-loyalist alliance:

During the strike itself a situation developed whereby, as Samuel Johnson famously remarked, ‘when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully.’ For unionists the prospect of being ‘hung in a fortnight’ helped concentrate anti-Sunningdale unionist minds towards a more unified strategy, particularly in highlighting their opposition to the Council of Ireland. However, once the Executive collapsed, unionist and loyalist divisions immediately began to re-assert themselves and the strike itself was called off to avoid the embarrassing prospect of it collapsing as well.

Commenting on the myth which sees Sunningdale as a “missed opportunity”, Gillespie is equally sceptical, arguing that ‘neither unionists nor nationalists at large were prepared to make the compromises necessary to make such a political settlement work’. Political Scientist Stefan Wolf concurs, arguing that the Agreement was ‘not a treaty between two states, but an Agreement reached between two states and a selected number of political parties.’ In order for it to work, he contends, ‘it would have required substantial support for those partners in the agreement who were most volatile to pressures from their own communities’.

Legacies

Forty-five years ago, Northern Ireland saw its best chance of a power sharing settlement thwarted by the inclusion of an Irish dimension which was rejected by the vast majority of unionists. Today, power sharing is once again thwarted for other reasons, namely the political corruption attached to a Renewable Energy Scheme. However, this is merely the manifestation of something more deeply ingrained that we cannot ignore: The lack of trust between the two communities, which has been reinforced by the political architecture designed to manage this deeply-divided place. It is for this reason alone that we should reflect on the significance of past attempts to resolve the dispute. The absence of trust between unionists and nationalists has, of course, been complicated by more recent developments, such as the flag protests of 2012-14 and the decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. In many ways these challenges have been accentuated by the resurgence of militancy from within loyalism and republicanism where violence has intersected with criminality and the growth of populist nationalism. While there is much that can be said for these developments, I wish to concentrate my gaze in my closing remarks on the legacy of the Sunningdale experiment and the UWC stoppage for loyalism.

The first point to make is to challenge the idea that the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was essentially ‘Sunningdale for slow learners’. This famous quip by Seamus Mallon demonstrates a paucity of generosity or understanding of the political philosophy of Ulster Unionism and the gravitational pull felt by loyalists for their British identity. Historian Sarah Campbell has observed that while ‘many of the elements of the Good Friday Agreement looked like those agreed at Sunningdale, the concepts of both power sharing and the Irish dimension were of very different complexions in 1998 than they were in 1974’. By 1998, loyalist grassroots parties were proving electorally viable in their support for the Belfast Agreement. To Progressive Unionist Party politician David Ervine, the new Agreement represented ‘the will of the people’. In his first contribution to the elected Assembly in 1998, Ervine talked of a ‘new dynamic in the politics of Northern Ireland,’ noting how some 71.12% of the people voted in favour of the Agreement. Ervine lambasted those who, he said, ‘accused everyone else of not being democrats, and then by their very actions, language and attitude, challenged the single, most important democratic decision that has ever been taken in Northern Ireland’. Fast forward twenty years later and Ervine’s colleague, Billy Hutchinson, was sounding a more despondent note when he told *The Irish Times* that:

I don't think we have moved on in the last 20 years, I think we actually went backwards. We never had shared responsibility because no matter who was in power, the two largest parties carved things up and that's not good for society. It shouldn't be a case of a penny for me and a penny for you, a pound for you, a pound for me, a million for you, a million for me. It should be about dealing with the issues that matter to everybody.

In short, Hutchinson was articulating a sense of loyalist disempowerment. Academics David McCann and Cillian McGrattan have analysed the effects of such political disaffection:

As the flag protest continues to demonstrate, issues to do with inclusion and exclusion of voice and experience remain central to debates in Northern Ireland; discussions over procedures and trust lie at the core of studies and commentaries surrounding increasing voter apathy; and differing perceptions over what exactly constitutes 'agreement' abound in contemporary developments over political developments.

Since the collapse of the power sharing Executive in early 2017, these questions continue to feed into the discussion surrounding the talks.

There can be little doubt that one of the most significant developments in recent years has been the side-lining of loyalist voices from the power sharing structures. It was Glenn Barr who relayed this kind of frustration at a conference at Queen's University in 2014. He saw how the UWC strike had been used by politicians in a bid to move their own agendas forward:

The age-old problem we've always had is that the ordinary working class were used again. They were brought out of the rabbit hole and when the dirty work was done and over, and all the plaudits had been handed out, they were shoved back into the rabbit hole again.

This legacy of loyalist abandonment remains acute. We see Ulster Protestants represented by a dominant political party that has benefited from the collapse of two power sharing executives. At the same time, there is a paradox alive and well in the relationship between unionists and loyalists – on the one hand, both are determined to maintain the union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, though, on the other hand, they compete with each other about how best to achieve this overarching objective.

Conclusion

It was Mark Twain who said that ‘history does not repeat itself but does often rhyme’. In Northern Ireland it might be better to think about history as a broken record, an insufferable song stuck on repeat that we are condemned to listen to forever. As journalist Don Anderson would write in his book about the UWC strike, ‘The greatest single cause of the success of the stoppage was the deep sense of political grievance felt by the majority Protestant community.’ It is this deep sense of political grievance that pervades the unionist community today. Sunningdale and the UWC strike merely acted as a lightning rod for such disaffection. Its collapse did little to resolve the underlying grievances that fuelled the stoppage in the first place.

* * * *General Discussion* * * *

[Peter Bunting] For our discussion today I will be Chair, Martin Snodden will be Facilitator. But first of all we are going to have a response from the panel to Dr Edwards’ excellent presentation.

[Dr. Sean Farren] Can I begin by complimenting Aaron on a very detailed paper which threw up a lot of issues. I just want to say a few things about the strike, particularly from an SDLP perspective. When the strike broke out I was living in Portstewart. Across the road from us was another young couple, from a Unionist background. My wife was friendly with the wife, and when the strike broke out she was talking to our neighbour, who said: “We would eat grass rather than accept the Sunningdale Agreement.” And my reflection on that was: well, if you eat grass that might indeed be a protest, but what is the *solution*? What’s so wrong with proposing that the leadership of both our communities should work closely together, that we should also have North-South relationships, somewhat along the lines of what was outlined in the Agreement? I didn’t find that there was a rational answer to that question coming from the leadership of the strike. They were certainly protesting, they were certainly willing to eat grass, but what was the *solution* that was going to follow? You couldn’t eat grass forever, you couldn’t just continue to protest, there had to be some answer that was acceptable across our two communities. And if it wasn’t what was in the Sunningdale Agreement, what else could it be?

And I didn't hear that. And here I am reflecting the views within the constitutional side of the nationalist community who were willing to settle for arrangements within Northern Ireland, willing to accept that the status of Northern Ireland could not be changed without the agreement, the consent, of the majority. If that couldn't be accepted, what alternative was there to which a significant section of both communities could give assent? I couldn't hear any answer. What were the strike leaders offering to put in place once the institutions were brought down? It seems to me that the strike and the destruction of the 1974 power-sharing arrangement precipitated 25 barren and tragic years during which there was no real engagement between the political leaderships of both sides of our community, until we began to try and pick up the pieces again in 1994.

[Jim Wilson] Okay, folks: I have no PhD, I'm not a professor and I am not a doctor, but most of the stuff that Aaron was talking about I have lived through. When Internment was introduced I was a young lad of 17 years of age. I was a member of a gang mentioned earlier, Woodstock Tartan. I was its leader at the time, and when I was put in Crumlin Road jail we were the only ones who could serve Republican prisoners [their food], because the prison authorities wouldn't let young republicans do that for fear of them exchanging messages and stuff. There were elderly men and all there, and they were asking me what was going to happen to them; there was fear in those guys, even hardline Republicans.

There *was* a fear factor. When the Troubles started and the barricades went up we knew that there was something happening that was scary. Indeed, the barricades were there to stop people from coming in and attacking us. Woodstock Tartan started off with about 70 or 80 of us, but it grew to over a thousand young lads. [UDA leader] Tommy Herron came to meet us, when we were causing all the violence at the interfaces, and tried to get us to knock it off, tried to control us, but we wouldn't let them control us. Herron wasn't a nice guy to me and my family. I had people taken in and arms and legs broke because they weren't doing what they were told to do. Yet whenever the Vanguard rally was held in Ormeau Park it was the Woodstock Tartan which led the groups in with all the other Tartans.

But why did I go from being in an ordinary street gang to joining a paramilitary organisation? The catalyst for me, and for a lot of people, was 'Bloody Friday'. A young lad who run around with our gang worked in the buses at Oxford Street and when the news came on TV about the bombings, we watched this body getting shovelled onto a stretcher – that was him. He only had one leg, his head was blew

off, his arms were blown off, so when all us young lads sat down afterwards, we said: that's it! So we began to engage in the conflict. We engaged the enemy, which was the IRA, and we engaged the nationalist community. I know now that that was wrong, and all the things that were done were not done in a way you would want to do when you would classify yourself as a soldier. But David Ervine described it right when he called it 'a dirty, stinking war' – and we engaged in that war.

I do remember two or three things leading up to the period Aaron was talking about. We had been doing security at Vanguard headquarters for Bill Craig and others. Young lads protecting them with guns, ensuring that those leaders within Loyalism were being protected. I remember that we got a message that at this big protest coming up at Stormont we would be taking over – Paisley was going to take over, there was going to be a *coup d'etat*. And we brought weapons up, hidden in prams. But it didn't happen. So the risks were being taken by working-class lads, working-class Loyalists, and the people at the top were telling us we were going to do this, we're going to do that... those political leaders of ours took risks with our lives, but didn't think what the consequences would be for us. As a young lad I always had this belief that Paisley was our leader, and we would have done anything that he said, and followed him to the ends of the earth, but as I got older and more experienced I realised how much we were being used by our political leaders at the time. Anyway, as a young lad I engaged in the conflict and I was interned whenever the strike happened. There were a lot of young lads interned, the youngest internee from East Belfast was 15 years of age.

But Loyalism was following mostly what Paisley was saying – to our detriment, it has to be said. I always felt that this country would go nowhere until Paisley became Prime Minister; when he became 'First Minister' that was it, because that's what his aim was from Day One, to be the leader of this country. And I think he would have sacrificed everyone else – bar his *own* family – because it was my family, and my friends, and my kin, that went to graveyards and into jail, at the behest of him and other people. You look at how well *his* family has done, and it is our kids that have suffered.

[Sean O'Hare] Aaron mentioned the newspaper reports coming up to '66 about a massive IRA attempt to start a revolution and try to take over the North. But these newspaper reports would have been in the Unionist press *every* election time: the local Unionist MP would come out and say: "I'm here to help you; they're all behind the Black Mountain, and if we don't stop them they'll be down next week!"

I joined the republican movement in 1964, I was the youngest member in our branch. The branch I belonged to covered Ballymurphy, Turf Lodge and Andersonstown – and there were only six members! Plus about ten older men who didn't go to meetings. I left about 18 months later and went to London and became active in left-wing politics there. I came home in 1969, a month or two before things got really bad. On the Thursday night [14th August] I was shot outside St Comgall's school by 'B Specials'. After that I remained in republican politics.

The split in the Republican movement came in late '69. The vast majority of active republicans in '69 would have remained with the Official IRA. The Provisionals were made up of older men, and Catholic defence groups who were promised lorry-loads of weapons that were in a hay-shed in Monaghan and would be up in a couple of weeks. That's the sort of thing that was going on, and it was very hard to be an Official at that time because you were saying no to all this.

Having left-wing views my friends and I believed this was the beginning of a world-wide socialist revolution, and we were in the vanguard. That sounds ridiculous now, but if you had been reared in the 60s you would have believed that sort of thing. But it didn't happen and I was interned and the Official IRA called a ceasefire in 1972. At the time I didn't agree with it because I was on this world-wide revolution thing, but subsequently you realise that the leadership was right to do that. Our leadership was in Dublin mostly and were away from the thing, so they could give a more clinical view of it. But we were all emotionally reacting to what was happening. When I was released from Internment I stood in the 1973 election for the Workers Party, but didn't get elected.

The UWC strike itself empowered the paramilitaries on the nationalist side, because the people felt lost, there was no way of getting heat, or cooking food, or getting their bins emptied, so the paramilitaries went and got lorries and emptied the bins, and went to demolition sites and got wood and lit fires at the end of each street, and built sort of cooker things for the people. Afterwards I stayed involved in left-wing republican politics in various forms, although for the last few years I have not been involved in any group, but am as active as I can be in the Connaught Rangers Group and the Fellowship of Messines and anywhere else I am asked to give a viewpoint.

[Dr. Sean Brennan] I have worked in the community sector for many years, and have always been in and out of loyalist communities. When I got my first degree the PUP were quite vibrant at the time and some of them asked me to work with

young people around history, because they felt they needed more guidance in understanding their own history. I did a Masters in Peace & Conflict Studies, which led me to write my doctoral thesis on reintegrating loyalist ex-combatants. And when you are doing a thing like that you have to look at things like: what is a loyalist, how do you become a loyalist, what does loyalism actually mean?

But before I address some of the issues Dr Edwards raised, I'll give you an anecdote about the strike. When Stormont was closed, we got sent home from school. And at the time there were all these ominous warnings that there would be a 'backlash'. Now, none of my school mates knew what a 'backlash' was but we assumed it was going to be something dreadful. And as we walked home the weather suddenly deteriorated; indeed, it was almost biblical – the clouds came over, everything went black and we got totally drenched as we were walking home. And we thought: This is the end of the world; we are going to be slaughtered! God must be a Protestant!

Let me now address some of the issues Dr Edwards has raised. I see Sunningdale from a conflict management perspective, and I feel we probably had to go through what we went through to get to where we are today. When you do academic research it brings things into a different focus. Now, whenever you look at republicans one of the things republicans are famous for is learning when they go into prison. The likes of Paddy Devlin: he was interned in the 1940s; when he came out he moved beyond republican physical force activities and became a politician. There was never that experience within the loyalist community. Between 1921 and 1972 there were very few loyalists imprisoned. But from the 70s onwards loyalists increasingly ended up in Long Kesh and Crumlin Road jail. And to use a phrase that I kind of tweaked from a researcher on Republicanism: 'Loyalism eventually went to the Imperial Finishing School.' And from that experience you began to get new insights emerging, new leaders coming through, primarily Gusty Spence, and we all know what Gusty did in the jails, and Davy Ervine articulated that with the question: '*Why* are you here?' And so you start to see that analysis coming through. So Sunningdale and Direct Rule kick-started that.

The other interesting thing is that when you look at Sunningdale and the UWC strike you see a conflict management process starting to emerge. No disrespect to Sean [Farren] or any of the other people who were involved in the design and drafting of the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, but I would say that in one hundred years' time historians of that period will not be writing about the politicians they will be writing about the civil servants. In '73 the UK and Ireland

joined the EEC and that naturally created the context in which senior civil servants began to work more closely with each other. And you are beginning to see that kind of evidence starting to emerge as some of those civil servants start to publish their memoirs. If you want to be really crass about it those British and Irish senior civil servants achieved something that nobody else could achieve: they ended the war in Ireland in 30 years. From '72 to '94, to '98, those civil servants worked in the background and created all those political contexts, so that's why I'm saying there may have been an inevitability about this. Aaron mentioned Frank Steele. Steele was quoted in Peter Taylor's book on Loyalists, and when Taylor asked him why this didn't happen before, Steel said: "They hadn't suffered enough." Maybe Sunningdale was designed to fail, to let people see that things needed to move in a different direction.

The UWC strike drew loyalist paramilitaries to the fore, and then after that what happened? As Jim said, they started to realise: hold on a minute, Paisley is telling us there's going to be a *coup d'etat*; we're getting ready to go out and fight for our families – and then they find out they have been sucker-punched. And not only that, but after '74 you start to see more and more members of the UDA and UVF being imprisoned, and that's when they begin to get their real education. And that comes to the fore in the 1990s, when it is loyalist paramilitaries who are actually pushing for the peace. They took the war to the Provisional IRA in a way it had never seen before, there were more members of the Provisional IRA killed than ever before, and loyalists felt that they were in a base from where they could sue for peace.

And I think that one of the aspects of the Sunningdale era which is seldom talked about is: *what was it that loyalists wanted?* What kind of society did they want? You can see that with Glenn Barr in the talk of an independent Ulster, and what that meant. And that goes back to the core rationale of the loyalist community in Ireland: what kind of society do they want to create? And I think that is something that has yet to be fully articulated.

I will finish with a story that a UDA guy told me. He said that the UWC strike was the worst thing that ever happened to the UDA, because after that strike they lost the people. The story he told me was that one of his neighbours was going to work and this guy – he was only 16 at the time – was ordered to stop him. And his neighbour refused, so he punched the lunchbox out of his neighbour's arm and kicked it up the street, and the bread and meat went flying. And he said that guy glared at him every day after that. He said that when he saw the way that guy looked

at him afterwards he realised: we will never get the people back again. And I thought that was an interesting insight: we won the strike, but we lost the people.

[Peter Bunting] Thanks for all those thoughts. I won't answer Sean O'Hare's analysis of the republican movement in 1969 for I would differ very strongly, however. Martin, you are going to facilitate a general discussion.

[Martin Snodden] I have to say as I am listening to this I am saying to myself: I was one of the those young strikers. But time and hindsight are a great thing. What I want to do now is invite *your* perspectives on what you experienced at that time and then years later with regards to the hindsight, when you have reflected on it: what is your opinion *now* about what you experienced then? We talked about the fear, but as a teenage lad there were also excitement, a sense of comradeship, a sense of community – all of that was around, emotions were flying all over the place. And then you spend a lot of years later looking back at that time, and hearing what the panel has said this morning. So we are interested now to hand over to you.

[Peter Bunting] I now invite some questions – but not speeches from the dock!

[Erskine Holmes] I was in the Northern Ireland Labour Party and also involved in the Civil Rights Association. The question I have relates to the formation of the Volunteer Party. Ken Gibson was chairman of that. Did that come out of the UWC strike, did it follow the strike? I ask that because what was then termed the Brigade Staff of the UVF held a seminar in Scottish Churches House in Dunblane, and Gibson, Hughie Smyth and others were at that and we were trying to lead them towards the idea of a political party.

[Jim Wilson] Erskine, I was 19 when I went into Long Kesh and the first person I was bunked up with was Ken. A lot of dialogue was going on, and this was before David Ervine came on the scene, and I know that Gusty was very prominent in all the stuff that went on. I remember going to see a play which made it appear that there was no thinking in Loyalism. In fact, Loyalism was, early on, thinking very seriously about how to get out of the conflict and how to stop all these things, and Gusty was behind a lot of this, and pushing the likes of Ken and David, Plum Smyth and others, who were involved. I know that whenever Ken and myself and others got out we were instructed by Gusty that the way to go forward was to engage in politics, to create a situation where the organisation has a route map into politics and to try and engage. Ken didn't do very well, and the Volunteer Party was disbanded, but out of it came the PUP which I was heavily involved with.

We struggle within loyalism to actually capture the vote. We struggle to get the vote from people. The fact is they look at those of us who come from a background of the UVF, the Red Hand or the UDA, as being violent and not the people they would want to represent them. You ask the question then: why nationalists went to Sinn Féin in the way that they did to make them become the largest party in Nationalism? I remember a UDA man standing in East Belfast. East Belfast UDA at that time had 1000 to 1500 men, yet he only got 300 votes! I think it is to do with the criminal side of what we had done as volunteers, or combatants.

[Aaron Edwards] At the time, in July 1974, Ken Gibson and another individuals went to a meeting with James Allen, a British official. We know this because the paperwork is out there. Loyalists were encouraged to think about politics and so they went to meet British officials. However, there was a lot of fluidity within the UVF ranks and there were serious internal disagreements. But there are other people there who were urging the UVF to move into politics – Rev John Stewart from Woodvale was a key figure in that period for getting loyalists to think politically. He was a member of the NILP. And people like David Overend and Jim McDonald, who go on to form the PUP. It's a key year, because you see the wellspring of politicisation within Loyalism happening.

[Martin Snodden] Bear in mind that during that period in the early '70s there were people came out of the prison from the UVF ranks and a coup took place. So there was a change in the brigade staff from the period of the Volunteer political party to that period in the 70s when it became a more military organisation, through to the mid-80s, whenever Gusty and Davy came back on the scene and things changed again, and there was a parallel approach through those later years.

[James Edwards] I would just like to ask Sean: did the Northern Ireland Labour Party have any effect on you, their politics, when you went to London?

[Sean O'Hare] When I was in London, the politics I was involved in was crazy stuff – instant revolution, a bit of Maoism, all that – so any establishment party were traitors. But when I came home the Northern Ireland Labour Party did have an effect, although I would still have been republican, and the 'Northern Ireland' aspect of it [didn't sit well]. I knew a lot of people who were involved in it: the OC of the Belfast Battalion of the Official IRA had been in the NILP, and other people involved in the Official IRA had been in the Northern Ireland Labour Party. The thing which broke the Northern Ireland Labour Party in nationalist areas was

not passing the vote to condemn Internment. That just broke it in nationalist areas.

[Rab Williamson] When I reflect on our history... such as 1912 and the Home Rule Bill, and the formation of the UVF, when people were prepared to take up arms against their own government.... there seems to be a similar pattern with the UWC strike. And what I want to know is how the panel feels: *what was the fear of democracy?* For we have to admit that the country wasn't democratic for all people – the gerrymandering and all that kind of stuff – so what did they fear? Working-class people on the Shankill and the Falls suffered the same deprivation, in housing, jobs, everything. The socialist road would have been a better answer.

[Sean Farren] You are dealing with the essence of democratic society. And our society is riddled with fears, with distrust; but when leaders – whether in politics, or in the trade union movement, or community leaders – begin to consider drastic action in response to the fears that exist, I think that they have to address the *consequences* of the actions that they are advocating. And I put that question to the Provisional IRA. What were the consequences likely to be of the war that they launched in '71, '72, in order to achieve a British withdrawal? What were the odds in favour of them *winning* such a war, before they would ever organise to engage in violent activity to achieve that end? What did the leaders of the strike in 1974 hope to achieve, beyond destroying the institutions which had been lawfully and legally established, after widespread consultation, after elections, which showed there was a considerable majority in the community – taken as a whole – in favour of the new arrangements, to judge by the results of the June '73 election. I know that there was a Unionist majority against, but it was a narrow majority.

But the fundamental question is: in a democratic society, where we are free to organise and to voice our fears, what responsibility do people take on when they organise to try to subvert the institutions by force or by a mass strike which causes considerable disruption and pain throughout our society? It seems to me with respect to the Provisional IRA their claim that there wasn't an alternative is challenged by the existence of a plethora of political parties, from the nationalist/republican side of the community right across to the loyalist community. It seems to me that the UWC strike is challenged by the fact that whatever was likely to happen to the institutions, in particular if they were destroyed, what kind of institutions were going to be put in place to replace what had been agreed at Sunningdale, that would attract widespread cross-community support.

And of course we can talk about the absence of trust, we can talk about fears,

but we can only overcome the absence of trust by working together. You don't have to love the person you're working with in order to work with him effectively within agreed parameters, but if you start to take a gun to that person's head you are not going to get anywhere at all!

[Rab Williamson] My reflection, growing up in Rathcoole at the time, was that there was overwhelming support for the strike. There seems to be an argument that it only happened because a couple of bad men had guns, but our entire community didn't want a United Ireland and that was what they feared. And that stage it wasn't only the IRA; the Irish government had got involved, they had opened up refugee camps, and sent 500 rifles up to the border. It was no longer just a terrorist threat, we felt we were in real danger. So, my question, is this: only recently we became acquainted with Francis Hutcheson, the famous philosopher from Saintfield. And he said that governance of the people is a contract, and when the government break that contract the people have every right to rise up against them. So, from that sort of philosophical background, can the UWC strike not be viewed as perhaps one of the greatest examples of raw democracy in Western Europe since the War?

[Sean Brennan] One of the most important things people need to realise, is that Loyalists – and historically by that I mean Loyalists in Ireland – are the most frightening thing to the British government, because they are constantly looking for forms of government which are inclusive, and which will preserve their freedom to live as they chose. Francis Hutcheson is the perfect example. He formulated ideas, which ironically enough, became the republican idea. So whenever you hear talk of republicanism, what you are listening to is 17th and 18th century radical Presbyterianism being articulated. The drivers of that were the Cromwellian soldiers who lived on this island, who were abandoned by their government. When you start reading the literature on that you find that English policy at the end of the 17th century was to get rid of what they called their 'waste people'. And these 'waste people' were first sent to Ireland, and then sent on to the Colonies in America, where their Presbyterian radicalism again created big problems for England. Indeed, one interesting thing about Francis Hutcheson relates to the right to bear arms which is in the US Constitution: that was Hutcheson saying that the people had the right to bear arms so that they could oppose their own government.

And that sense of insecurity still runs through this 'waste people' who we now call 'loyalists'. If you read through history you can see there is a continual fear that

the English government, and later the British government, is going to sell the loyalists of Ireland out. That's where that residual fear comes from, as well as the fear that the natives are going to come and attack them, such as in 1641. And the belief that Irish Catholics are controlled by Rome also introduces a lot of challenges.

So there is this overarching question: how do we *do* government? And for the likes of Gusty, David Ervine and John McMichael, you see that kind of questioning coming through, and what they think a positive peace is going to look like. It all comes back to that idea of how do we live together, as Sean [Farren] was saying, how do we function with all our diversity and needs? How do we create a form of governance that will create – and I'll end on a Hutcheson quote – “the greater good for the greater number”.

[Jim Wilson] There was always the fear of treachery from the British government. I remember being told this quote of Winston Churchill after the end of the Second World War: “But for the loyalty of Northern Ireland, the light which now shines so strongly throughout the world would have been quenched.” And yet behind our backs he was negotiating for the use of submarine bases in the Republic and promising that they would have us as a country after the war. So, the treachery end of it was embedded in me in the early days. Although you wanted to be British, and to stay British, don't trust the British! That's sounds contradictory but it is factual: we have to fight to stay British, because constantly we have governments who if they thought they could off-load us they would possibly do that.

[Aaron Edwards] Historians spend much of their time looking at documentation and the thinking of the British government – because the British government wrote a lot of this down. And having seen the documents recently – that fear was real, the fear that there was a real decision the British government were about to make to withdraw. The idea, in the first instance, would have been a military withdrawal, but then Merlyn Rees and Harold Wilson would have said if there is a military withdrawal there will be a bloodbath, and so we can't let that happen because it is on our doorstep. But they were very much thinking about how it affected *them*, Great Britain, not necessarily how it would have affected us. They couldn't do it in the end, I think, because of the international dimension, and the European dimension. And I think that because they were now seen to be working, as Sean Brennan has said, closely together in this new European Community, I think the European dimension, and Britain's international standing, were the

reasons they didn't commit themselves to that treachery. But they *were* prepared to do it, they were *actively thinking* about this – and they wrote it down. I have got the documents to prove that Loyalist fears were not unfounded.

[unidentified] During that time I was in the Army and was actually put on standby to escort Imperial civil servants and their families out of Northern Ireland at that time. The government had made arrangement to withdraw from the Province.

[Sean Farren] At the risk of repeating myself, I can have no objection, as a democrat, to people mobilising and organising to protest and indeed to withhold their labour. But in doing so for blatantly political ends, as happened with the UWC strike, in a society that is as divided as ours, the question about consequences and alternatives has to be addressed. I would have thought that some of the fears that were being expressed could well have been addressed effectively as the institutions developed and evolved.

I must say that my own party too would have faced considerable difficulties, particularly around policing. The reference to policing in the Council of Ireland, to the kind of cooperation around policing, was very weak, and much, much less than the SDLP had hoped. It did not achieve what John Hume had hoped on the level of cooperation and responsibility for policing. And there were other weaknesses, as far as the SDLP were concerned. For example, it had agreed, probably too late to have any effect on the decision to call the strike, to stagger the implementation of the Council of Ireland mechanism, particularly with respect to the assembly-type body which was to be created between the Assembly in the North and the Dáil in the South. That was to be staggered until after the next set of elections to the Assembly, which would have been in four years' time. That was a hard fought-for concession, and many in the SDLP only gave their agreement to it through gritted teeth. But none the less, it ultimately came too late. In the eyes of the nationalist community Austin Curry faced considerable abuse because he had been one of those who had called for the rent and rates strike after Internment, and here he was minister for local government having to persuade people, and, indeed, enforce, repayment of the rents and the rates that had been withheld.

[Peter Bunting] Could I just make a few comments – it's very hard to ask a trade unionist to sit here and not say anything! We should remember that the leadership of the UWC was itself mainly comprised of trade union people; all of those guys – Harry Murray, Glenn Barr – they all got educated through the trade unions, so

they were leaders in a way of the working class. Another point to make is that, in comparison to republicans who come out of prison and have a status, when loyalists came out of prison they were frowned upon, even disowned. And that brings you to the fact that class in Unionism is much more sympathetic of big-house Unionism against the lower orders: you do what you're told because we know better than you do. The Protestant working class have been at the hind tit of the middle-class and upper-class Unionist community, and they have suffered badly because of that.

Sean [Brennan] mentioned John McMichael. John McMichael wrote one of the most inspiring documents I have ever read, on an Independent Ulster. It is really foremost thinking, and his assassination by the republican movement was a very negative thing. When we talk about culture in Loyalism we forget about trade unionists, we forget about our writers – C.S. Lewis and others – because people generally say, oh, it's all about the Twelfth of July and Orange bands. But it is far richer than that, far far richer. And we do ourselves a disservice in talking about those issues and not deepening and educating the loyalist working class into how rich their culture really is.

[Peter Black] My question is really for you, Jim, and Sean, or anyone who was involved in the 1974 strike. I do believe it had a democratic content, for I am a trade unionist and I know there were trade unionists who sat on the executive who organised and supported that strike. And it did have the principle of consent, no doubt about that. But, do you think that when the grassroots started to run this strike themselves, organising the petrol, postage... I had to arrange to get a Catholic postman to deliver giro's to the Tigers Bay area... do you think that because the workers started to run things, instead of the establishment, that that was when the strike started to end?

[Jim Wilson] We are living today with the consequence with what happened with that strike. The shipyard workers walked out on a number of occasions to defend what they felt was the right thing for Unionism and loyalism. But you look at what has subsequently happened to that shipyard. Remember that it was one of the biggest shipyards in Europe. When I was in it, I was a shop steward in the transport department, and there was 180 transport drivers. The Shipyard had 7500 workers, and now there is less than 100 people employed in it. Now, can someone tell me why we never got Ministry of Defence work, which has kept Scotland and parts of England like Newcastle going. No, certain political decisions were made to our

detriment. The community in East Belfast where I come from have suffered massively because of its loyalty to stopping things being imposed upon us. And we have paid the penalty for that. None of my kids will ever work in the shipyard. We don't have in our community politicians who are prepared to break their necks to fight for our communities, to fight for our rights, for as a British citizen I believe that part of that Ministry of Defence work should go to our community.

[Martin Snodden] My sense is that you think the strike was a failure. In actual fact, it was a success. The UWC came out to break the Sunningdale Agreement and it succeeded. The only time before that when the Protestant working class was mobilised was the engineering workers' strike of 1919, and 1974 was the biggest mobilisation since then with regards to challenging the government.

[Nigel Gilmore] Most of the panel seem to revert back to history, and nearly every one of you have included the word 'fear'. My question is for Sean [O'Hare]: Loyalists cite the fear factor when we look back to the Covenant, to Carson, Home rule; fear of nationalists getting into power, the Roman Catholic Church having an influence...it all evolves around fear. But we don't hear too many stories of fear within republicanism. Was there any fear for yourself? What made you join whatever you joined, or motivated you to do whatever you got involved in?

[Sean O'Hare] I was brought up in Ballymurphy and as far as people there were concerned the Unionist government had nothing in this wide world to do with us. The only contact we would have had with officialdom was down in the City Hall paying your gas bill. We looked upon all the statues around the City Hall grounds as having nothing to do with us; indeed, they were symbols of victories *over us* – that was our attitude.

Then after the violence of '69 most republicans said: right, we've had enough, the Stormont government will have to go. It was only when people sat down that they realised later – the sensible ones – that this wasn't the way to go about it.

So, it wasn't fear so much as an acceptance of our second-class status in this society, but once our acquiescence with this state of affairs disappeared, you felt you *could* change things, that you didn't have to be a second-class citizen. But on the night of the first trouble in '69, a group of us had been standing together, talking and laughing, and an old woman came over to us and said: "You'll not be laughing when they come to shoot you in your beds!" In '69, and even in '64 during the Divis Street riots, the older people were saying: "Don't do all that, you will

only bring trouble to our doors, you're only going to bring them down on top of us again." That was the attitude: it wasn't fear so much as acceptance. But once that acceptance was broke in '69 everything went haywire.

Can I add this: what we all tried to do was to justify why we did it. You can justify it in the circumstances you were in then, but the next step that we all have to ask is: was it right? was I wrong? It is very hard for people, especially paramilitaries, to say that they were wrong. But, in the long run, we were all wrong.

[Nigel Gilmore] Jim had said about being British and all. What was wrong with being an Irish Unionist? Carson was an Irish Unionist, but we seem to want to be *British* Loyalists. What is wrong with being an *Irish* Unionist, and have no fear?

[Jim Wilson] Paisley's first church was 300 yards from where I was born and reared. And I followed him. I remember going and listening to him when he spoke from the back of coal lorries. But it is like anything else in life, you learn. I remember a guy saying to Gerry Adams after the Good Friday Agreement: "All this for that? All those people who died for that?" And when I sit and quantify where I have been and what I have done, and look back with all sorts of regret about people who have lost their lives – and I think everybody, Republican and Loyalist, who was involved in the conflict must look back and say: what was this all about? And question ourselves and our moralities and where we went. But as a 19-year-old lad who got involved in the conflict and done what I done, do I feel proud? I feel proud that at that time I did what I did to defend my community and do what I thought was the right thing. But when I look back on it now as a 67-year-old father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, I am ashamed of some of the stuff that I done, I have to say that. But my answer to that is I now work within the community to try and make things better. An ex-life sentence prisoner asked me one time: 'What the eff are you doing this for?' The knives I was getting in my back, and all the other stuff, and getting involved with the PUP, and in community work. And the cross-community work I was involved in. And even though I was the most hated person in the Short Strand at one time – and they would meet with anybody from East Belfast but me! – I still got more attacks from my own people than I did from republicans and nationalists. So, the journey you take as an individual, whether as a republican or loyalist, you evaluate yourself and you say: is it worthwhile, do I continue with this? I have reflections, I have a closet, and it's not nice being in that closet, but that's what I have to live with, I have to live

with who I am and what I have done.

[Peter Bunting] Can I give a narrative as well. I entered a monastery in '64, at 14 years of age. I left at 18, back to Belfast and at nineteen I joined the republican movement, in '69. There was lots of fears in our communities, that we were going to get butchered in our beds, by loyalists or B-Specials, or whoever. I then left and went back to Dublin and became the first full-time employee with Sinn Féin. In 1974 I said to myself – or the wife said to me: give that carry-on up! So, I gave it up and I found trade unionism as the way forward. And then thirty years ago I converted from Catholicism to Anglicanism. And I wear a poppy in Dublin and I wear a poppy everywhere, because I have been in Messines with this group. And I don't apologise for it, and I wear it up and down the Falls. The only people who get upset about me wearing a poppy are the DUP; they ask me: why are you wearing that! And I ask: why not, is it a sectarian emblem?

And [looking back to that time] I can say to you: there was fear and there was madness, and it was all built on fear, and young people who were idealistic, who were political in one sense, wanted to defend their community or die for Ireland, whatever. But as Jim said, and as Sean will recognise, I have *huge* regrets, massive regrets – it can put you into depression some times. And I suffer from depression occasionally, over some of those things I was involved in as well. And I work with everybody in our community: I sit on the Alternatives board on the Shankill Road, I sit with Sam White with the Resolve board in East Belfast; I worked with Martin many years ago, I worked up in Mount Vernon with Billy Hutchinson. For I believe that trade unionism is the only way we can unite all the working-class people here. That's what I came to believe many years ago and I have been fighting ever since.

However, I know you are concerned about fear, there is still a bit of fear about the way forward. I believe that if we actually work out the Good Friday Agreement, and we continue the type of work we are doing here today, which is a great example, then we will work together to bring our society together. Reflecting back to the John McMichael document, I think that *before* we ever get to a United Ireland I think we need to have a *United Ulster*. I think that's the most important thing: to unite our people and to stop the sectarianism. I hate and detest sectarianism, always have, always will. And if we can't stop that there is no hope for us. There is a phrase trade unionists use: we got separated by religion at four, and we were separated by class at eleven [the 'Eleven-plus' examination]. And

unless we break that down there is no way we will ever progress, and I believe that the only future for us is to unite our working-class people across a shared political future.

[Clifford Peeples] Just a question about the UWC strike and specifically the Dublin and Monaghan bombings in context to it. The UWC strike was slow to start with; it wasn't really sure at first whether it was going to take off, in fact people were walking to work laughing at people who were picketing. It was only after the Dublin and Monaghan bombings that it gained impetus. My question is really to Aaron: what do you think of that? Was it a deliberate tactic? And do you think that tactic in the use of bombs in the Republic by loyalists also stayed the British and Irish hand in pulling out? For we know that on two occasions the Wilson government in its first tenure had already had discussions that there would be a pull-out scenario, and also in '74 he expressed that even further.

[Aaron Edwards] This is a very emotive and controversial subject, but if you look at it objectively, if you look at it strategically: were the bombings done to spoil something? That's a question I have in my head. And I think there is evidence to support that; I think if you look in the wider context people who were killed within loyalist paramilitaries who had entertained political notions, and suddenly the hardliners were given precedence. I know Dawn Purvis, David Ervine, Billy Hutchinson and others have said that any time loyalism gets a head of steam up there is someone there to spoil it. And that used to happen at elections – twenty years ago in my area, Newtownabbey, where the PUP were doing good work on the ground and then suddenly someone loses their life and they don't get as many votes as they anticipate. I have written and spoken about this for years now, and I think there is definitely something there but it needs further investigation. And that's to do with the strategic result of what happened. Now, regarding the strike: did it support it inadvertently? Yes, it definitely added some kind of impetus, but what was the *intention*? – and I can't give you a clear answer on that.

[Jim Wilson] Every single election we have had we waited two weeks before it for the Sunday newspapers to create a situation, and when we talk about why Protestant and Unionist people don't vote for the likes of the PUP and ourselves, part of the reason was because the hidden hand used to come out all the time. Every single election we had there was always something negative happened before it. No matter how progressive we want to try to be within Loyalism we don't get any credit for it. The only thing most people in this room would hear about Loyalism

is all the bad stuff that has happened around Loyalism. Yet the biggest percentage of work being done in loyalist areas by ex-combatants is good work. But the only thing you'll hear about is the drug dealers, the scumbags, the extortionists, those people who have no more interest in Loyalism than they have in the man in the moon. But what you'll not hear about is the positive work. You'll not get that on the front pages of the *Sunday World*, or on the Nolan Show. I did an interview with him for one hour and he promised he would definitely come out and do positive work for our community – and that's two years ago, and we're still waiting.

[Martin Snodden] I am now going to ask each panel member to summarise and close.

[Sean O'Hare] My own opinion is that violence will never achieve anything ever again, and I also think that the Unionist community have nothing to fear. Because they seem to think that Sinn Féin controls Ireland: it doesn't. They need to face up to their fears, and ask the nationalist/republican community: what do you mean by a United Ireland? What would it be like? How would I fit into it? Would I even be welcome in it? Will I always be able to remain British? Both sides agree to that, but nobody says it. They should confront Sinn Féin with these questions.

[Sean Brennan] For me, the UWC strike was extremely important, it transformed how we look at the Loyalist community in particular. I think that it had a major impact in moving Loyalism towards a peaceful settlement. I think there are still big challenges there. What is the Loyalist community going to look like on the island of Ireland? If you look at the demographics, David McWilliams the Dublin economist makes the point that the demographics in Northern Ireland at the moment are the exact opposite to what they were in 1921: an ageing Protestant population, and a vibrant Catholic population. So that's the future we are going into and we have to find a way of how we are going to relate with each other in this new future.

[Sean Farren] Unfortunately violence *does* achieve ends, although not the ends that we wish. Violence in our society prevents things happening, or destroys things that could happen. The UWC strike eventually led to the return, in the 1975 Convention election, of a Unionist majority that was not prepared to consider any viable form of power-sharing, let alone an Irish dimension. And violence achieved the untimely deaths of thousands, and injuries which had dire consequences for the life expectation of many in our society. So violence does achieve. That's why

when our leaders of the violent campaigns and of the extreme action taken in the UWC strike, consider what they were at, they should also have considered the consequences as to what they were about to launch. It took us, sadly, another twenty-five years before we grasped an opportunity together to try and forge a new future. And that future is in danger, although I am optimistic that we can come through the present round of talks and if perhaps not immediately then within a short period of time, we can see the restoration of the power-sharing institutions. Which will hopefully help us to address the fears. Those fears have not gone, they may have reduced to some extent, but they are there and they can be easily rekindled if we are not careful. So we have to work together to build trust and to overcome the fears that have been articulated here.

[Jim Wilson] I look at the power of the people. I look at the Civil Rights marches and what the Catholic people believed they were fighting for. I seen that as a rising from the people. And I see the Ulster Workers' Council strike as something similar within the Unionist community. What I want to finish with is this: if I was the salesperson for Sinn Féin, and I was trying to sell a United Ireland to Unionists I would be sacked tomorrow. If I was a salesperson for the DUP in trying to sell staying within the United Kingdom I would be sacked tomorrow. They are not doing a very good job, either party, in trying to sell their ethos to either of our communities, so we need to look at how we deal with these things. And if the past has taught us anything we have to learn how to be civil, work with each other and help each other.

[Aaron Edwards] The UWC strike for me was a pyrrhic victory for Loyalism. I think they won the battle but lost the war. And it was, ironically, probably the closest we ever came to a British withdrawal and a United Ireland. I think that today that's the way people should remember what happened, and work to articulate a more positive vision for the future, one that is inclusive and anti-sectarian. One which actually includes everyone, irrespective of colour, creed, sexual orientation and so on, but, just as importantly, class.

[Martin Snodden] I think we should give a round of applause to the Somme Heritage Centre, and to the panel. And to the most important people who are here today: you, the audience. For some final words let me pass over to Harry Donaghy of the Fellowship of Messines Association.

[Harry Donaghy] What we are trying to provide are opportunities for civil

discourse, with a heavy emphasis on the 'civil'. We need it now more than ever. And we in the Messines project are committed to carrying on with these types of engagements whereby those conversations can take place. And others are doing the same thing. So, hopefully, we will become accustomed to treating one another in more understanding and compassionate ways. If we go beyond our delinquent and outdated forms of British and Irish nationalism, we can maybe catch up with the other seventy-odd million people who live in these islands, for whom that is not a killer question any more. Not to abandon your Irishness or your Britishness, but to promote a civil discourse in a modern context between the two.

[Martin Snodden] A final thanks to Harry Donaghy and the Messines Fellowship.